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PROGRAM Morning Edition

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SUBJECT U.S. Ambassador to the UN Nominee

GENERAL VERNON WALTERS: If this nomination is approved by the Senate, I will do my best to continue the superb work that Ambassador Kirkpatrick has done in the United Nations to restore and enhance the position and the interests of the United States.

BOB EDWARDS: Vernon Walters, President Reagan's choice to succeed Jeane Kirkpatrick as Ambassador to the United Nations. Walters has been serving as Reagan's ambassador-at-large, carrying out numerous low-visibility missions as a global troubleshooter. By his own count, he's traveled to more than a hundred countries and logged over a million miles during the past four years.

Walters is a gifted linguist who has translated for five U.S. Presidents. He is said to have good contacts with foreign military leaders, especially in Latin America and Africa.

Walters is a retired Army General and a former Deputy Director of the CIA.

Associated Press State Department correspondent George Getta told NPR's Dan Morris that the length of Walters' career is particularly impressive.

GEORGE GETTA: He was translating or interpreting for President Truman back when Truman was a rookie President, back in 1947. This is before David Stockman was born. And he has known de Gaulle and Churchill and Eisenhower and every major leader since World War II.

DAN MORRIS: And as a roving ambassador for President Reagan, what exactly has he been up to?

GETTA: Well, he claims that he is very often the bearer of bad news. For example, when the United States, because of budgetary constraints, has to cut back on the foreign aid of Country X, Walters is usually assigned to deliver the bad news.

He had to break the news to the Argentines that the United States had no choice but to oppose Argentina's invasion of the Falkland/Malvinas Islands. He claims that territorial disputes are rampant throughout Latin America, and if the United States advocated the use of force in the Argentine case, chaos would have been rampant elsewhere in the hemisphere if that principle had been established in the Argentine case.

MORRIS: Where else has he been over the past four years?

GETTA: He's spent, apparently, most of his time in Africa. Having said that, three out of every four of his missions have been unknown outside the State Department. And the identity of these hundred countries is largely a secret, although I suppose I could name 25 or 30 of them. But the other 70, I don't know. And he has said that if the identities of those countries were disclosed, a lot of eyebrows would be raised.

MORRIS: Do you think that it may evolve that he could become a major figure in the Administration?

GETTA: I don't think he would try to assert himself as much as Mrs. Kirkpatrick has done. He indicated while he did not plan on being, in effect, a deaf mute, he didn't plan to be too assertive. I think he will try to make his views known, to press for his point of view in Cabinet meetings and with the President and with the Secretary, but probably less intensively than Mrs. Kirkpatrick has.